

Oswald Alone Is Blamed

By RUTH MONTGOMERY

WASHINGTON — Sen. John Sherman Cooper, breaking his silence on the raging controversy concerning the Kennedy assassination, says he is absolutely convinced that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone.

The Kentucky Republican, who was a member of the Warren Commission, said in an exclusive interview: "We quite naturally looked for a conspiracy, but we could find no evidence of such. We examined the case with unbelievable thoroughness, testing and re-testing hundreds of witnesses.

"Because we were concerned about Marina Oswald's testimony, (Sen. Richard Russell and I flew to Dallas toward the end of the hearings and reexamined her, with counsel, for five or six hours.

"We wanted to make certain that she was holding nothing back, that she had no new facts to bring out; but we had to conclude that she herself had become convinced of her husband's guilt, after first thinking him innocent."

I asked the senator if, in view of the doubts raised here and abroad, he thought that a review panel should reopen the case, and perhaps utilize a devil's advocate to try to rebut the evidence.

SEN. COOPER replied: "I see no need of it. I think our conclusions were correct. We had Mark Lane (author of 'Rush to Judgment') before us twice under oath, but he could not produce any testimony to support the statements he'd been making."

Cooper, a former judge who is known as "Mr. Integrity" in the Senate, believes that the same bullet which inflicted President Kennedy's neck wound also injured Gov. John Connally, despite the latter's insistence that he was struck by a different, second bullet.

But the Senator disclosed that he and Rep. Hale Boggs were as insistent as Sen. Russell that the commission's language on that point be softened from "categorical" to "persuasive evidence" of the single-bullet theory.

Disputing claims that one or more shots were fired from the front, which would necessitate a second assassin, Cooper said: "As a former judge I've tried shootings and murder cases, and there was hardly a one when witnesses agreed about all the evidence, such as where the shots came from.

"Gov. Connally is an expert rifleman, and when he heard two shots he turned to the back. Although he has identified the frame (of the amateur movie) in which he thinks he was struck, his hand was up, whereas it had to be down for the bullet to pierce both it and his thigh. Sometimes in war soldiers don't immediately know they've been wounded. There's often a delayed physical reaction, and we're talking of tenths of a second in this case."

POINTING OUT that it would be virtually impossible to assemble a more diversified, independent-minded panel than the commission members, Cooper declared:

"All of us were searching constantly in every possible area for clues that might have been overlooked. I spent several nights at the home of (former CIA Chief Allen) Dulles, and many hours in Russell's office discussing it over and over. I did the same with (Rep. Gerald) Ford and others—all of us searching for any possible holes.

"The overall evidence led each of us, with different types of minds and different ways of thinking, to the unanimous conclusion that Oswald was the sole party involved.

"The only two bullets found came from the rifle purchased by Oswald and discovered on the sixth floor of the Book Depository Building. We could find no proof that he and Jack Ruby knew each other, or that Oswald had acted in concert with anybody."

Asked if he did not consider it strange that officer J. D. Tippit was able to accost Oswald so quickly after the assassination, without some advance or unexplainable knowledge, Cooper replied:

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"THE WHOLE CASE is strange. It is strange that the president should have been shot, and that Oswald should have been working in a building overlooking the motorcade, and that Tippit and others should have been exactly where they were at a particular moment in history.